

Families reach \$60 million in landslide settlements



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

Family members of victims of the Oso landslide, including Dayn Brunner, left, and Seth Jeffers, right, react in King County Superior Court, Monday in Seattle, after the announcement that a settlement had been reached in a lawsuit brought by survivors and family members of people killed in the slide against the state of Washington and a timber company that logged an area above the site of the slide.

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Survivors and family members of people killed in the nation's deadliest landslide have reached \$60 million in settlements with the state of Washington and a timber company that logged an area above the site of the collapse.

Just as opening statements were due to begin in a Seattle courtroom Monday, Grandy Lake Forest Associates agreed to settle liability claims for \$10 million. The announcement came just after the state on Sunday reached a \$50 million deal with the plaintiffs.

The slide on March 22, 2014, killed 43 people when it wiped out a rural neighborhood in Oso, northeast of Seat-

tle. Survivors and relatives of the victims alleged that logging above the slide and construction of a retaining wall along a bank where the Stillaguamish River undercut the hill increased the danger, and residents were never warned about it.

Pam Sanford, whose brother was killed, called it a "huge relief" that she wouldn't have to sit through the trial, which had been expected to last nearly four months.

"Reliving those details is something I am done doing," she said.

The plaintiffs filled several pews in a courtroom in King County Superior Court on Monday. Judge Roger Rogoff told them that while no legal proceedings could bring the victims back, "I hope the set-

tlement you've reached in this case can bring you some measure of closure."

Some of the plaintiffs dabbed tears from their eyes.

Dayn Brunner's sister, Summer Raffo, was buried and killed as she was driving to work along State Route 530. When her body was found five days later, her hands were still gripping the wheel.

Some of the money from the settlement will go toward a permanent memorial at the site of the slide, he said.

"My No. 1 priority was to ensure my sister's legacy lived on," Brunner said. "Today was an affirmation of that."

Later Monday, Rogoff ordered the state to pay more than \$1.1 million because its expert witnesses in the litigation were deleting emails that

should have been preserved.

Rogoff ordered the state to pay more than \$394,000 in costs and attorney fees due to the deleted emails and to pay nearly \$789,000 in punitive damages.

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson has acknowledged one of his lawyers knew for the past year and a half that experts hired by the state to determine the cause of the 2014 slide were deleting emails among themselves.

While the settlements largely end the case as far as the state and timber company are concerned, some issues remained.

Snohomish County had been a defendant before being dismissed by the judge. The plaintiffs are appealing that decision, arguing that the county was also liable.

Animal rescue becomes baby beaver believers

By JORDAN NAILON
The Chronicle

CENTRALIA, Wash. — One might think there would be an inherent empty nest syndrome that sets in after your one and only bald eagle flies the coop.

Luckily for Claudia Supensky at For Heavens Sake Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation in Rochester, she's got Barklee the beaver around to keep her spirits up, reported The Chronicle.

Supensky released America the eagle back into the wild. The well-attended event marked the culmination of a miraculous seventh-month recovery from a broken wing. At first, it was thought that America would never fly again.

Supensky, though, never gave up hope on the majestic bird and patiently nurtured the eagle back to health.

Supensky insists she was not sad to see America fly off across spacious skies and over amber waves of grain, since the

whole point of rehabilitation is to return wild animals to their natural existence.

Still, having a bucktoothed baby beaver around the house hasn't hurt at all either.

A wee baby

Barklee was discovered in the spring by children playing on a wooded trail in Graham. Back then, she was just a wee little baby beaver. Beavers have strong family ties, and the mysterious separation from her family unit was a bad omen for young Barklee, so the decision was made to find her a rescue facility.

"There was nothing wrong with her at all. She was just a baby that still should have been with her mother," said Supensky, who noted that the process of rearing and reintroducing a beaver to the wild will take between two and three years. "It's very labor intensive to raise a baby beaver."

Supensky has now assumed the unlikely role of beaver den mother.



Pete Caster/The Chronicle

Barklee the beaver takes a swim in his pool inside an enclosure at For Heavens Sake Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation in Rochester, Wash.

For the first few months, she had to bottle-feed Barklee, and the baby beaver lived inside the house in the bathroom. Using the bathtub as her pond, she would take branch and leaf clippings and fill all of the crevices around the tub in an effort to outfit her new home and to keep the water from draining away.

Supensky said it was

uncanny to see such a strong set of natural instincts emerge from a beaver bound to a bathroom.

Once, much to Claudia's delight, Barklee discovered how to work a roll of toilet paper from the wall and proceeded to pull the two-ply sheets off in a single strand, weaving it in between the gaps between the toilet and the bath-

tub and back around again. Whenever the strip would rip, Barklee would simply return to the roll and grab another sheet and restart the process.

"When I saw her doing it I said 'just let her do it. It's entertaining her, and me, and it's not hurting anything,'" said Supensky, who claims there is a video of the interior decorating effort floating around somewhere.

Moving outside

Recently, Barklee started the transition from the confines of the house to a beaver-friendly enclosure outside. After all, For Heavens Sake wants to keep her as wild as possible in order to one day release her back into the great outdoors. Eventually, the hope is to be able to build her a full size pond for her to indulge all of her beaveriness. Early on though, the transition has been a bit rocky.

"She's enjoying it part of the time and the other half she wants to come back in the house," said Claudia Supensky.

The first night that Barklee

stayed in an enclosure outside, she chewed a basketball-sized hole through the 1-inch thick cedar boards. Luckily, the hole led only to another chamber of the building, but Barklee was eagerly awaiting Claudia's husband, David Supensky, when he opened the door for morning chores.

Beaver hijinks

Despite the bucktoothed tribulations, the Supenskys say they are enjoying having Barklee around, especially for her special brand of hijinks.

As it turns out, Barklee is a big fan of stuffed animals. Back when she was a house beaver, she escaped her bathroom den and found a giant bag of stuffed animals in an adjoining room and brought them back to the washroom for a beaver den tea party of sorts.

"She took that whole zipper bag and pulled it back to the bathroom and then took every one of them out one by one and made them hers," said Claudia Supensky. "She's just a hoot!"

Retired math teacher offers 10 cents a mile when hitchhiking

By DEAN KAHN
Bellingham Herald

BELLINGHAM, Wash. — Michael Schneider of Lummi Island is lean and tanned, with white hair, a short white beard, and an intelligent face.

Not the sort of person you'd expect to see thumbing a ride, but the kind of person you might decide to drive to his next destination.

The 72-year-old retired teacher has become a Johnny Appleseed of the benefits of hitchhiking. He considers ride-sharing a commonsense way to help the environment that has been discouraged by a culture of fear.

"I'm the only guy out there," he said. "You can drive from New York to San Francisco and not see a hitchhiker."

A native of the Midwest, Schneider taught math and drama in New York and Colorado, then lived in Oregon before moving to Whatcom County nearly a decade ago. As a teen, he hitched through Europe, a common diversion for young people. But unlike most thumbers, he has continued to hitchhike, reported the Bellingham Herald.

While living near Denver, Schneider sometimes hitched more than 40 miles to his teaching job. His topcoat and briefcase apparently did the trick; he was never late for work.

When he lived in Bend, he hitched to promote his idea of a membership-based ride-sharing program, akin to a nonprofit Uber for hitchhikers. His plan didn't take hold, but ride-sharing programs have surfaced elsewhere in the country.

Seeing the country

In recent years, Schneider has traveled to distant parts of the country, then hitchhiked to explore the local history and scenery, and to meet local residents.

"It's a unique way to see the country," he said.

He traveled to western Wisconsin four years ago, then hitched south to Postville, a small town in northeast Iowa. The reason? Schneider had enjoyed a book, "Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America," about the town's response in the 1980s when members of an orthodox Jewish sect opened a kosher slaughterhouse nearby.

The following year he flew to Kansas City, Missouri, and hitched west to Lawrence, Kansas, to meet a woman who was trying to start a ride-sharing program, then thumbed his way to Denver.

In 2014, he flew to Atlanta and hitched through Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

"Southerners know that Northerners are afraid of them," Schneider said, "and they can't figure it out because they know they're nicer than us."

In September he traveled to Knoxville, Tennessee, and hitched through Kentucky coal country before flying home from Cincinnati.

"I spent eight days just moseying," he said.

Again, a book contributed to his choice of destination. Schneider had read "Storming Heaven," a novel based on the real-life "Battle of Blair Mountain" in 1921, when 10,000 coal miners clashed with 3,000 coal company supporters and law officers. Their weeklong battle, including biplanes that dropped bombs, left dozens dead.

In Benham, Kentucky, Schneider visited the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum, where a floor of exhibits showcases Loretta Lynn, who grew up in nearby Butcher Hollow and who started her family and singing career in Whatcom County.

He was struck by Kentuckians' friendliness and determination while living in an economi-



Philip A. Dwyer/The Bellingham Herald

Michael Schneider, a Lummi Island resident who hitchhikes all over the country with a pay-as-he-rides offer to drivers, poses in Bellingham, Wash. notforsale

cally depressed region.

"There's a combination of palpable despair, and also generosity," he said.

Offers to pay

To increase his odds of getting a ride, and to show his appreciation for drivers who stop, Schneider travels with a sign saying he will pay 10 cents a mile. Most drivers decline his offer. Others mistakenly think he's asking for help and offer him money or food.

"The poorer they are, the less likely they'll take your money," he said.

Schneider says hitchhiking is safer than people think, espe-

cially with stronger laws against drunken driving.

He likes to share his story about hitching from Klamath Falls, Oregon, to Bend the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A middle-age woman in an old Datsun who gave him a ride asked why he was hitchhiking. He answered, in part, "It's my way of fighting fear in America."

Schneider does follow common-sense safety practices. He declines an offer of a ride if the situation doesn't feel right, and he doesn't hitch at night.

"If I hit a town that's got a motel and it's 4 o'clock, that's where I stay," he said.

State Supreme Court rules police can't inspect packages

Associated Press

PORTLAND — The Oregon Supreme Court has ruled that a common practice of police pulling packages from the mail stream to investigate them for drugs is unlawful.

On Thursday the court ruled that Portland police and U.S. postal inspectors don't have the right to flag packages without a warrant, The Oregonian reports.

The ruling comes in the case of Max Barnthouse, who was 26 in February 2012 when Portland police and a U.S. postal inspector set aside a package for him at the Portland International Airport postal cargo center. Investigators had a drug-sniffing dog smell the package and found there was something of interest in it.

Police then showed up at Barnthouse's home in Portland's Belmont neighborhood with the package and the urgent request to open it and to search Barnthouse's

bedroom. Barnthouse consented to both searches, and police found marijuana and cash inside the package.

Barnthouse's attorneys argue police violated Barnthouse's right to be free of unlawful search and seizure.

Police said the procedures used in Barnthouse's case were typical. On a given day, they usually pull about 30 to 40 suspicious-looking packages from the postal cargo center and walk a drug dog by them for a "sniff test." The dog is correct about 90 percent of the time, an officer testified.

The court ruled the investigators did not have cause to pull the package in the first place and that they needed a warrant to do so.

Barnthouse's attorney, Stephen Houze, applauded Thursday's ruling, noting this is the first time the high court has ruled on the practice of police and postal inspectors pulling aside mail without warrants.

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